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ABSTRACT

Attracting and assuring the success of students of color requires the rethinking of curricula to meet the needs of underrepresented, underprepared, and economically disadvantaged students. General education offerings should be restructured to give students the skills and resources needed to make sense out of their particular gender and ethnicity, while emphasizing not the old world or new world, but the one world shared by students and teachers. The resulting core curriculum would be: (1) socially cohesive, providing common reference points to all members of society; (2) culturally inclusive, drawing upon diverse human cultures and affirming the contributions of all social classes; (3) ethically selective, supporting values necessary to environmental and species survival and human fulfillment; (4) conceptually generative, providing skills and general principles which allow for the synthesis and critical assessment of information; and (5) personally significant, creating options for in-depth study of particular cultures, classes, and conditions. Skills would be developed across the curriculum by making improvement in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking the responsibility of faculty in every discipline. Another way of reforming college curricula to better serve disadvantaged students would be to focus on applied skills courses during the first 2 years of college and the theories supporting those applications in upper-division courses. This model would serve students who want strong occupational preparation, but also aspire to a bachelor's degree. In revising curricula, colleges must be prepared to meet the challenges of new technology, the need for qualified faculty, and the need for resources to develop new texts, courses, and skills necessary to teach the new curriculum. (WJT)

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Rethinking the Curriculum to Meet the Needs of Underprepared Underrepresented, and Economically Disadvantaged Students: Majors and Courses for the 21st Century

by

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JC 900 317

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Paper presented at the Annual Conference of Ethnic and Language Minorities (Sacramento, CA, February 28 - March 2, 1990).

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Rethinking the Curriculum to Meet the Needs of Underprepared, Underrepresented, and Economically Disadvantaged Students: Majors and Courses for the 21st Century*

Attracting and assuring the success of students of color is not only a matter of a welcoming campus, fully funded support services, and sensitively delivered instruction: It is also a matter of enlightened curricula.

Among the many possibilities for curricular contributions to ensuring a livable future for all Californians, I want to focus upon three that are particularly promising. These three emerge from consideration of the needs of students of color; their promise, however, is for *all*. They promise, first, a common sense of human history, supportive of societal and environmental survival, in how general education patterns are designed; second, explicit attention to higher order thought processes in how courses are taught across the curriculum; and, finally, a pattern of college success economically within the reach of all, in a new type of baccalaureate major specifically designed for the occupational transfer student.

Before I get into the substance of my remarks, I want to stress two preliminary points. First, I want to emphasize one more time that at least for the curriculum initiatives I will be urging, what is good for some is good for all. Unlike the distribution of scarce resources these curricular changes are not part of a "zero-sum game". Thus some of the tricky ethical questions and risky political choices involved in "positive differential treatment" do not arise.

My second preliminary point is that I believe that what I will propose is fundamentally doable. It will take the will, of course which I believe we have in abundance. It will take resources which we can get. It will take a spirit of adventure, for it is an invitation not only to enter a new age but to help define it. It will take quiet persistence because what I will propose is primarily a matter of encouraging subtle changes to the hearts and minds of many individuals. What I am proposing will probably require also some new policies or new regulations or new interpretations of old regulations, because that is how in a large system we command attention, direct resources, and create sufficient procedural space to permit innovation. The solutions themselves, however, will not come from policy or regulation or confrontation or coercion because personal transformation and creativity can only be supported; they cannot be mandated. And, finally, it will take ingenuity--which--by means of this paper-- I invite you to contribute.

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* This paper represents the views of the author, Dr. Nancy Clover Glock, writing as an educator. It has not been reviewed by the Chancellor's Office and should not be taken as a statement of Chancellor's Office policy. *Ethnic & Language Minorities Conference 1990*

So let me now extend this invitation, an invitation to begin to envision new possibilities and then, yielding trust to each other--across races and across disciplines-- to find out, by trial and error, how this vision may be realized.

Invitation #1: To encourage diversity *without divisiveness* by restructuring general education offerings to do two complementary things: First, provide a core curriculum rooted not in the old world, or the new world, or the third world, but in the *one world* that we now share; and second, give all students the resources to make their own sense out of their particular gender and ethnicity.

Underrepresented students should not have to choose between respecting their own roots and participating in the larger society--nor should anyone else.

Many students of color do not successfully pursue higher education not because they lack intellectual ability, or strength of character, or good sense, but because the demand implicit in the requirements of the traditional curriculum is for such students to cut themselves off from their roots, deny the value of the subcultures which nurtured them, and disguise, abandon or do battle with a large part of what they have felt themselves to be.

Underrepresentation, then, does not only mean too few students of color in our classrooms--it means too little color in our courses. It means that it is the CULTURE that is "underrepresented" -- and that hurts all underrepresented students--not only those who opt out at the cost of their own power, but also those who opt *in* at risk to their own identities.

Nor, does underrepresentation in the core culture hurt only the underrepresented. It hurts *all* students. And it hurts them, I would argue, not only because we white anglos need to be able to deal with a world of color, but because we *need* that world of color, because the dominant culture is in many ways no longer capable of nurturing human existence.

The very heritage that has brought our society such advances in knowledge and justice--and I do not romantically dismiss these for a moment--that heritage brings with it also the subtle or not so subtle denigration of technologies that are not industrialized, societies which are not "civilized", occupations which are not "white collar", and arts which are not displayed in museums or attended in tuxedos. The virtues of Plato and Aristotle notwithstanding, for example, it is still true that in the almost universally uncritical treatment of their works as representing "the" foundation of modern society lies assurance that each educated generation will be taught anew to accept as somehow a given that human beings are at their best when split off from nature and at war with their own

instincts. And from these same teachers new generations will learn that the oppression of social class is the inevitable result of innate differences in people and that the uneven distribution of wealth and power are not unjust inasmuch as they reflect the intrinsically greater worth to society of the contributions made by those at the "top".

The simple fact is that the cultural identity currently available to me and to the rest of white America in many a classroom costs us too much as well--as our own dropout rate attests. The fact that we may the more readily allow ourselves to be dominated by the dominant culture and to accept these sacrifices in greater numbers, having been given less basis for questioning them, makes them no less lethal to our humanity.

My personal irony in all this is that I have come to feel that the only reason I accept this domination so unquestioningly is that my own ancestors were themselves subjugated so long ago that our history is almost lost. As an American of English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Norwegian, French, German, Dutch and Swiss descent, my claim on the history of the Greeks and the Romans is strictly mythical. MY ancestors, Celts all--I suppose--our tribal history not having been taught, I'm none too sure--anyhow they were the "savages" that destroyed that flower of human technology and oppression that was Rome. Where then are *my* "ethnic" studies?

On the other hand, if I am to choose my "myths", and to base my claims to history not on race but on cultural tradition--as I must for "Western civilization"--then, as an American, let me also lay claim to all the other traditions that have made this country what it is--not just those from the Mediterranean. Let me point out that when I was a Californian living in Boston what I missed was "my" culture, the "Spanish" culture of my native state? What if I were to say, "Black history IS my history"? and thus lay claim to that part of American history which is recognized everywhere else in the world as distinctively American. Maya Angelou in her recent appearance here in Sacramento said "I claim William Shakespeare as mine. And I claim...as mine, and ... as mine" and she went on naming Japanese and Arabian and African and African-American poets, in a voice commanding ownership so powerful no one would ever dispute her. And, I realized as I walked out, that in her claim lay my own. Why must I be taught that these beautiful writers, who make my heart sing as surely as does Shakespeare, or Homer, "belong" to someone else and become known to me only if I take a special course in "someone else's" history. In today's world, I submit, there is only one history, and that history is the history of the human race.

What then do we do? Do we introduce a more critical reading of these authors whose views are the cornerstones of our culture? Do we add in some other authors? Do we add a requirement in

Ethnic Studies? Yes; all of the above; most certainly. But we do not stop there, because in the long run the core curriculum of Californians cannot be only "Western" culture patched up with pieces torn from ethnic studies. It must instead be a new fabric, woven from threads of many colors. It must be woven from the love of stories and rythmn, which is universal; from the affinity to the land and delight in human beings which is tribal; from the rooted calmness which is of ancient civilizations; from the mutual assistance and support which is of the village--AND from the "rationality" and individuality and love of the intellect which is urban, and from that respect for brute fact which is modern. We must weave together those images and skills and dispositions which are humane, just, and environmentally sound--wherever these qualities can be found--thus helping our students to make sense of our emerging one world culture and to find that which will nurture and sustain us in a time of enforced return to simplicity.

What I am asking, then, is that in setting our general education requirements and creating courses which meet them, we--in a sense-- set aside the "dominant" culture in which history as written by the victors perpetuates racism in the most subtle, powerful, and intractable of ways, and that we, base these requirements as we are able, upon a "core" culture, which can be shared by all with denigration of none.

I am saying, for example, that in establishing a core culture, we would at least consider the possibility that agriculture arose not because some people finally became "smart" enough to figure it out, but because they became hungry enough in a world already suffering from overpopulation of the human species to leave the "Garden of Eden" and take up the hard labor of tilling the soil. And that civilization arose in many places, not because humans were at last ready to discard more "primitive" ways but because some hungry people conquered others, making slaves of them, and herding all behind thick walls to protect what was theirs--including "their" women.[1]

Criteria for a "One World Curriculum"

Valuable as it is for a pluralistic society to be culturally inclusive, and to allow for the cultivation of as many ethnic identities as there are groups willing to pursue such studies, the constant danger is that the educations of groups will diverge so completely that they will lose their common reference points and common language, the society split into mutually warring factions. Nor is this a far fetched fear, for historical examples of this phenomenon are everywhere to be found. But to depart from the dominant tradition need not be to abandon the possibility of having a "core" culture to undergird society. What is urged here, on the contrary, is an effort to *assure* social continuity by resisting the forces of disintegration, while not using such fears to justify the

continued hegemony of a culture--or a social class--whose dominance is as much a function of historical bloodshed as of the intrinsic merit of its traditions.

I am proposing, therefore, that we begin to work toward the creation of a core curriculum that is:

1. **Socially cohesive**: Provides common reference points to all members of the society

2. **Culturally inclusive**, draws upon diverse human cultures and affirms the contributions of all social classes without particular regard to who have been the "winners"

3. **Ethically selective**, provides common reference points which, on the whole, support the the values necessary to environmental and species survival and human fulfillment and encouraging dialogue on these matters both by appealing to the traditions of many cultures and by critically assessing all such traditions where they seem to be at odds with the core values of a "one world curriculum"

4. **Conceptually generative**, provides skills and general principles, drawn from the main disciplines, which allow for the synthesis and critical assessment of large quantities of information and its integration into practice, while enabling constant updating of knowledge and skill

5. **Personally significant**, creates options for the in-depth study of particular cultures, classes, and conditions, and treats all of these studies with respect, not confusing the compulsion to merely elevate some cultural traditions at the expense of others with the necessity to uphold standards and teach critical judgement.

In seeking such a "one world core curriculum", we are not merely responding to an inescapable "problem", but seizing upon a rare historic opportunity, a moment as profound as that following the discovery of the ancient Greek texts which led to the Renaissance. We are at a cultural crossroads not unlike that facing Europe as it entered the age of commerce, faltering in its struggle to make medieval sense out of a new world--and ceasing finally to *be* medieval when meaning could only be made under a brand new paradigm. The technology that has shrunk the world--and threatened its future--has thrust into our hands the tools for transforming our culture in short order, demanding a gestalt switch in how we view the world. This nascent "one world" paradigm has turned Europe upside down, ended the cold war overnight, and made of rock and roll--appalling as that may be to some--anexpression of global connectedness.

Invitation #2: To develop *skills within the context of their use* by making skill development in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking the responsibility of faculty in every discipline--supported, naturally, by specialized courses in these subjects--rather than the other way around, as we do now.

Underprepared students should not have to choose between learning skills *and learning* content.

One of the truisms in minority concern has been the need for cultural sensitivity to differences in learning styles of students from different backgrounds. In taking that perspective, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that many if not all of the specific sensitivities apply to most human beings. Virtually all students thrive in a supportive environment, with collaborative learning, that appeals to the visual and the kinesthetic as well as the verbal, and draws upon student experiences and aspirations to help them integrate new learning. But the fact that many "dominant culture" students succeed in classrooms where none of those conditions exist does not mean that such deficient instruction is "more appropriate" or even "O.K" for such students anymore than the fact that some individuals in some plant species manage to force their way up through a crack in the pavement under a cloud of smog means that that's a healthy or particularly appropriate place for that kind of plant to be.

There is a wealth of new knowledge which has become available in just the last few decades about how human beings make meaning out of information and it is imperative that we integrate this knowledge into our entire curriculum, now. Among the points coming out of this developing literature on "critical thinking", "cognitive processing", "metacognition", and "learning skills", three points should be stressed:

1st) While it is crucial that instructors come to have some understanding of the cognitive styles and belief structures, as well as skills and dispositions that students bring to college from different cultural backgrounds, this understanding is part of a larger awareness that is the foundation of good instruction; namely, that all students bring to the classroom structures of reality that must be taken into account in teaching them. As teachers, we are not teaching the ignorant; we are aiding students to restructure preexisting habits and assumptions. And this restructuring is cognitively as demanding an exercise and profound a change as that of artists or scientists or other "experts" working on the frontiers of knowledge. It requires of our students, and of us, moral courage and a willingness to recognize and relinquish fond beliefs.

2nd) This restructuring is a *process*, and it is a *social* process, achieved through collaborative wrestling with ideas, by both teachers and students, *out loud, hands on, and in writing.*

3rd) Finally, part of what this new knowledge tells us is what common sense has always told us: people learn by doing. And, people learn to do "academic things" by doing academic things. By being challenged, they come to understand the nature of the challenge; by trying out their skills in their actual courses, they begin to master them. It is incumbent upon us then to create content-

based courses in which the academic skills generally necessary for success are taught in intimate connection with the "generative" concepts specific to particular disciplines, rather than being taught only in basic skills courses segregated from the rest of the curriculum.

Here again, those curriculum changes that would best serve students of color would best serve all students.

Invitation #3: To integrate liberal and applied arts and to structure baccalaureate *transfer programs that build upon more specialized knowledge of applications* to be acquired in the lower division work, bringing in the theoretical background at the upper division level.

Economically disadvantaged students should not have to choose between earning a Bachelor's Degree and earning a living

Hands-On Liberal Arts Curriculum

In the new federal vocational education bill, there is an expectation that what might better be called the "technology transfer" function of colleges will be much better integrated with the liberal arts function. And this expectation cuts both ways for it supposes not only that "occupational" programs can benefit from incorporating liberal arts concepts, skills, and perspectives, but also that traditional liberal arts courses can often be better taught if founded on some practical basis. Thus, higher mathematics could be taught to students in a shop setting and credited as meeting the general education requirement as, in effect, a "liberal arts" or "academic" course, as long as the exit level competencies are as they would be for the standard mathematics course. Technical mathematics, technical writing, technical reading, problem-solving, applied psychology, a course in "perspectives on modern business" (incorporating classical authors), audio technology for musicians, etc. all offer promise of reinvigorating both the technical and the liberal sides of the curriculum, while arousing in students of practical bent a thirst for liberal learning, and providing for those struggling to understand academics, a grounding for that understanding.

"Applications First" Baccalaureate: A Third Model

Two models now dominate the design of baccalaureate majors. The first, the "traditional", has students spending their lower division studies primarily acquiring "breadth" and a "foundation" for later specialization. The second, the "technical" model, sometimes referred to as the "upside down" curriculum or the "high unit" major, has specialization at the lower division level, with heavy requirements specifically determined by the major, and some of the "general education" requirements "bumped up" to the upper division.

I want to propose a "third model", an "applications first" model. In this one, students take applications oriented, often "equipment-dependent" coursework in their lower division, with faculty who among other things have recent occupational experience, thus qualifying themselves for immediate employment. Then, at the upper division level, such students "catch up" on the theoretical background and complete a baccalaureate degree in technology, or business, or engineering, or architecture, etc., with no loss of time from their previous studies. In the few colleges now doing this, one for example which articulates a Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning program into a four year "Industrial Technology" degree, only transfer students can enroll, because the four year college does not offer the lower division portion of the major at their campus, lacking both the equipment and the occupationally qualified faculty.

Such an option not only meets the needs of students needing strong occupational preparation while still aspiring to an eventual Bachelor's degree, but is in fact a very exciting educational model for a number of fields. How many architects or engineers are severely handicapped for lack of the hands-on knowledge of an experienced technician or contractor? A program that begins with such knowledge provides solid grounding for all the theory to be learned and the designs to be created later on.

Challenges

Curriculum changes as deep as those I have proposed will not come in a hurry nor without intensive soul-searching and extensive discussion. But come they will, if they are good ideas, and if the following challenges can be met:

1. **Coverage vs. Leverage:** Integration of ethnicity, critical thinking, writing, and reading "across the curriculum", as well as the ever burgeoning demands of new technology and other developments in various fields threatens to expand the curriculum beyond the breaking point. The mere addition of more information thus will not do; rather there must be a shift toward the teaching of generative concepts[2] and fundamental information processing skills.

2. **Credibility vs. Quality:** Integration of knowledge across disciplines raises questions as to (a) who will qualify to teach these courses, (b) how course accomplishments will be defined and credited for purposes of transfer and toward the completion of majors, etc., and (c) what standards of content and rigor it will be appropriate to apply to such courses and programs. Current discipline categories in terms of which faculty qualifications and student accomplishments are defined must be reexamined to find ways to accommodate curricular innovation without sacrificing quality or impeding students' orderly progress toward their goals.[3]

3. **Transformation vs. Indoctrination:** The selection of curriculum content partly by conscious reference to the values thus to be promulgated is in itself not indoctrinatory inasmuch as selection--whether engaged in consciously or not-- *is an inescapable part of any system of education or acculturation.* Such selection of content becomes *indoctrinatory only*

when the value criteria ares used not just to identify what should or must be taught but to prohibit what may be taught. [4]

4. **Bureaucratic Procedures:** current definitions which drive requirements and funding must be reexamined to determine where they unnecessarily impede educationally sound innovations.

5. **Time and money**: the development of new texts, new courses, and of the skills and understandings necessary to teach the new curriculum successfully will take a substantial investment of time, and hence of money--some of it by existing college faculty, much of it by the next generation of graduate students. Moreover, since many of the most effective methods of integrating knowledge involve on-going close coordination of faculty including team teaching, compensation for the time involved in such coordination must come to be regarded as an on-going expense.

The most important ingredient in meeting these challenges, however, will be the *creativity* they demand--creativity in arriving at curriculum designs that appeal *across* the diversity and win people over by their power to make sense out of the emerging world. And with such a curriculum, I believe that ethnic parity in college and in the workforce will become a reality--and that that parity will not be feared but welcomed by a "recycled" white citizenry, our Berlin wall suddenly down and our world one/won.

Notes

[1] This is a brief summary of a theory advanced by Andrew Bard Schmookler in *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Evolution.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984; paperback, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986.

[2] Resnick, Lauren B. and Leopold E. Klopfer, *Toward the Thinking Curriculum: Current Cognitive Research, 1989 ASCD Yearbook*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1989, pp. 206-209:

> ...Knowledge is acquired not from information communicated and memorized but from information that students elaborate, question, and use. All the processes involved in understanding a concept take a great deal of time. Real, usable knowledge cannot be constructed from brief exposures to information....problem solving, writing, or reading skills...are acquired through extended practice, not in short, discrete lessons. Single problems may take up whole class periods or longer; essays are revised and reworked many times; several hours may be spent interpreting just one story.
>
> It seems clear that if this what the Thinking Curriculum requires, difficult choices will have to be made about what content to include....
>
> The solution seems to lie in teaching generative knowledge together with broadly enabling skills for learning. These include the text structures, genres, and rhetorical conventions that can help students organize reading and writing activities. Fundamental concepts and principles in specific subjects can also generate future learning. In each discipline, certain key concepts organize and structure large amounts of specific information. In arithmetic, for example, a broad principle of decomposability of numbers underlies much of the elementary school curriculum. In history and government, recurring themes such as the nature of representative government or the roles of

transportation and communication in national development could provide powerful boosts to much specific learning if they were well developed and understood by students...A search for the generative ideas and concepts in each discipline could provide a principled basis for deciding among the many competing bits of knowledge that now fill textbooks and classrooms.

....To be generative, knowledge must become the object of thought and interpretation, called upon over and over again as a way to link, interpret, and explain new information that students encounter.

Moreover, there may be a balancing out as the greater leverage purchased in the early weeks of a course--through delays in coverage occasioned by explicit instruction in the skills that aid learning--begins to pay off toward the end, as coverage speeds up perhaps at just the point when students would otherwise have begun to bog down.

[3] Several colleges have overcome these barriers to gain national recognition. Among them are the integrated general education programs at Los Medanos Community College in Pittsburg, California and another at CSU California Polytechnic at Pomona; and the new Fifth College in International Studies at University of California at San Diego.

[4] 'Indoctrination' is here used in its pejorative sense as a term denoting aims, content, or methods otherwise associated with 'education' which must be proscribed on ethical grounds. The "one world curriculum" value here to be preserved is that of the free exchange of ideas--even those ideas which do themselves condemn the free exchange of ideas. Thus, even though those values of fundamentalist Islam which severely constrain what may be taught to women are inherently at odds with the values of the "one world" core curriculum here being proposed, and could thus not be taught as *part* of that core, they could nonetheless be taught elsewhere and freely discussed, thus running the risk--always the risk of democracy--that values antithetical to its very survival would nonetheless be freely and democratically chosen.

(See also Glock, Nancy Clover, *"Indoctrination vs. Education"*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1975; available from Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

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